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Baseball's New Frontier

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Baseball's New Frontier

A History of
Expansion,
1961–1998

Fran Zimniuch

Foreword by Branch Rickey III

University of Nebraska Press | Lincoln and London

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Set in Adobe Garamond Pro by Laura Wellington.

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*This is for the true visionaries of the game,
who look and have looked with no limits.*

It is also for my sons, Brent and Kyle.

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Foreword

The phrase “The Game of Baseball” has been a companion of mine since my birth. Over the years, as others have used it to reference some grander institution, it was never that for me. Rather, it always seemed more like referring to one’s neighborhood, or discussing cousins in an extended family. Over the years I have seen that phrase mean different things. Television commentators and newspaper writers making critical reference can analyze it as a depersonalized thing, almost a monolithic institution. And in contrast, some people use the phrase with great deference, as if they were speaking of a revered cathedral.

Thankfully, for so many of us it instead conjures up a mental picture of the players, kids or professionals, out on the field of play, an elegant image with artistic and geometrical symmetries and embedded nostalgia to so many of our own previous experiences at the ballpark. What allure, what emotional associations this wonderful game truly has. The Game of Baseball, our wonderful sport.

Not quite so heartwarming is the more modified phrase “The Expansion of Major League Baseball,” which is, for so many fans, as

easily inelegant in symmetry and happily clouded in our memories. I think it true that the very adjective “expansion” when it precedes the word “team” immediately drags down the intrinsic value of the latter—whether by definition, or in the practical overview of most loyalists to the sport. Anyone who seriously delves into this topic of Major League Baseball expansion has the unquestionable advantage of access nowadays to an infinite reservoir of historical opinions, evaluations, press assessments, and scurrilous diatribes. How so, then, that I come to this topic with a relaxed sense of connection, and that I welcome the opportunity to give some preface to Fran Zimniuch’s ample elaborations?

Expansion is a concept that in and of itself is filled with such boundless potential for doing good. In my earliest years as an amateur player, in the 1950s, with a fascination for all things interwoven in the play of the game, I was originally introduced to the concept by my grandfather. His was an inflexible belief in America’s right to have Major League Baseball played beyond the existing sixteen teams, to include new franchises across and throughout our great nation. That the two existing Major Leagues back then, of eight teams each—that stretched only from the Atlantic to the Mississippi River and from our northern boundaries to no further south than the southern tip of Illinois—must be immediately broadened, was a position he ingrained in me and a topic that only needed the slightest common sense discussion to be firmly validated. From years before expansion eventually was implemented, I couldn’t imagine anyone unable to accept the logic of it.

Of course, my grandfather throughout his long career in the sport, first as a player, then as a field manager, and a general manager in St. Louis, later as president and part owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, and lastly as general manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates, had already enjoyed playing a role in changing the National Pastime in quite a number of fundamental ways. Signing Jackie Robinson to end the practice of excluding of African Americans will long linger as his most lauded impact, but there were so many others, including a huge structural

influence in the formation of what has become known as the farm system, where each Major League team has a development program of graduated levels of affiliated Minor League teams.

I suspect my grandfather's own limitations as a player probably helped motivate him in his future roles. And his refusal to go into a ballpark on Sunday, honoring an early promise to his parents, provoked him, surely, into a legitimate sense of individuality. Combined with the fact he had also begun his career backed by a college degree when those credentials were scarce among Major League players and then supplementing his credentials with a law degree, these were forces that must have caused him to view his profession through somewhat distinctive lenses. He learned, early in life, to be unafraid of innovation, and, as I saw clearly as his grandson when I came to know him better, he had reached a point of being patient, if not generally tolerant of persons unwilling to accept clear reasoning, those too timid to be creative and too willing to be self-deceiving. But while he generally showed patience with such perspectives in public, I saw occasions he would privately unleash his intellectual contempt for that genre of baseball professionals who instinctively opposed many forms of progress, especially obvious and needed changes that could bring short-term and long-term benefits.

A slogan coined by Scottish philosopher Sir William Drummond, hand-lettered in oversized calligraphy and bordered by a handsome gold-leaf and painted floral trim, framed and behind glass, hung conspicuously on my grandfather's office wall. It read, "He that will not reason is a bigot, he that cannot reason is a fool and he that dares not reason is a slave." Knowing him throughout my youthful years, while living across a farm pasture from his house, I'd watch him mesmerize family, friends, and others at suppers, with perhaps eight, ten, or a dozen persons at a meal. Over that time, I never remember him to have referred to this slogan. He didn't need to. Its presence on his office wall spoke volumes to his inner commitments.

Having now strayed from my mission, let me get back on track. I

said above that the word “expansion” drags down both the intrinsic and public value of the word “team,” and I mean that specifically, and say it here, to provoke the reader into an appreciation of how flawed the implementation was of this stage in the history of baseball.

If, as historians now seem to insist, the effort to found a new third Major League, the Continental League, immediately forced expansion in order for the existing teams to protect the exclusivity of the National and American Leagues, then let’s take a look at what was conceived in the heart of the radical effort that got blocked.

Quite simply, the Continental League would have added new teams across the United States, broadened the sixteen existing by adding another eight. Today, when there are thirty teams in Major League Baseball, it’s hard to imagine that an increase from sixteen cities to twenty-four in three leagues was fought so furiously. The Continental League had no plan to compete against its sister leagues initially. The new eight clubs could have played independently and with very predictable parity in their level of play. Only after years and years of maturation of its own teams, its own development systems, its own scouting staffs, was it conceived that the Continental League would become a worthy rival to its more senior competitors. Only when the new league demonstrated that it had advanced adequately would these new teams make sense as competitors to the league’s senior partners. This was the vision I learned as a grandson. It seemed such a desirable path, one that could be widely accepted if one was not enslaved to another concept.

As president of that envisioned new circuit, my grandfather quietly predicted to me that baseball would, of course, oppose the Continental League, that it would instead propose expanding its own ranks with expansion teams. That kind of “expansion” would line the existing teams’ pockets with expansion monies but, as so many new team owners and so many new member cities learned afterward so harshly, would then deprive those new teams from receiving back in exchange real quality players and would doom these new teams to starting up with

no reserves to draw from established Minor League development programs, and that all these steps would cause “expansion teams” to be cellar dwellers for long periods. More callous yet was that it would sentence the wonderful new fans in these markets to a long cycle of despair waiting for their local favorites to be really competitive for championship levels of success.

I was a youngster when hearing his forecast. He had the benefit of knowing the characters and reasoning capacities of the persons in charge, those who would be able to parade out star players and field managers for a cause célèbre and provoke Congress to legislate its bidding. Some of those were intent on making an industry out of the Game of Baseball, using ballparks to become their venues. Their general sense of treating their new expansion partners with any fairness regarding the play on the field was seemingly lacking. The incumbents dared not reason.

Years afterward, several Major League general managers and even a pair of team owners, as I came across them in random situations, lamented to me that they had fought the Continental League. “You know,” they said in words that all approximately paralleled the following, “your grandfather had it right. How I wish we had not chosen that other option. The way we went about expansion was a terrible mistake.”

I think the Game of Baseball has learned from this stage of its history and that there are many more forces inside the establishment endeavoring to protect and nurture the game rather than only exploit the business. It’s a delicate balance, but what a wonderful challenge, indeed, a magnificent challenge—especially for those who can reason as to why they should care, must care.

Branch Rickey III

Acknowledgments

Writing a book is a lot like falling in love. The idea is like that first look that ignites a spark that makes it difficult to think about anything else. While going about a typical day, your mind continues to return to this new object of your affection. With every thought the possibilities become endless.

Any book idea is exciting and scary. Can I do this? Will I be able to sell the concept to publishing company that will share my commitment to the idea? But despite the questions and the doubt, you know deep down that the concept will fly. Someone will share at least enough of your excitement to help you make it happen. This will be the one book that will give you all of the satisfaction you yearn for but just can't quite achieve. It will finally include that perfect phrase or the one word you spend hours reaching balance, and that elusive connection to the subject matter that reflects your thoughts and feelings will be made. This is the book that will make you feel more complete and finally accomplished.

Yeah sure . . . then reality sets in.

An agreement with a publishing company is like winning the lottery. But writing the book can be a grind, needing the discipline to dedicate the time necessary to complete the task while still maintaining the excitement and vision that first struck you like a bolt of lightning. Research, writing, interviews and staying the course represents a strong jolt of reality.

By far the most creative part of any book project is coming up with a concept that you can convince a publishing company to partner with you. Like anyone else who has ever written a book will tell you, ideas are plentiful. But it's the ability to get someone else on board with the project that makes it tough. And thanks to significant changes in the book publishing industry, you often find yourself shooting at a moving target.

The publishing industry has changed over the past decade thanks in large part to the economic uncertainty in our society. Folks just aren't flocking to the bookstores the way they did in the past. That has a dramatic effect on publishing companies that trickles down to authors, who have a much more difficult time selling their ideas. Anybody can self-publish, but that's not *being* published.

Countless companies now have to adjust the offerings they bring to the market because of that increasingly difficult bottom line. When people don't have the money or even the time to read as much as they'd like to, stirring an interest in them is an elusive challenge. While thought-provoking concepts and books with interesting historical analyses can still be found, books dealing with big-name celebrities are a much easier sale. People love to learn about the famous few in our society. Big names sell. But not all of us are interested in reading about celebs, and very few of us are interested in researching and writing about them. Plus, the rich need to get richer so the financial reward of writing such a book goes to them. So our jobs just got tougher.

That being said, I thank my lucky stars for the kind, professional, supportive, and incredibly intelligent people at the University of Nebraska Press for the willingness to partner with me on *Baseball's*

New Frontier: A History of Expansion, 1961–1998. Rob Taylor was my point man, and he was the perfect person to deal with. Rob was like a good neighbor: there when you need him but never interfering or micromanaging. Much like that new relationship that endures some rough spots, writing a book can be a rocky and winding road that ends up taking you to places you didn't think you'd be visiting. Rob was always there with advice and confidence. And he also realized that much like speed limits on the interstate, deadlines are a good starting point. Thanks for your confidence, Rob. You made writing fun.

If you like baseball and have an interest in how the game got to where it is now, you may very well enjoy reading about expansion in baseball. If you're not into America's Game, you will more than likely have the opinion that "Man, this guy needs to get a life." But much as baseball makes life a little more fun for millions of us, expansion made that personal connection with the game available to millions of other fans. It also opened the door for thousands of players. Has the talent pool been thinned out by the process, or has expansion caused more youngsters to put their athletic attention into baseball? That's a debate that may never end.

From its roots in calming potential legal issues with baseball's anti-trust exemption thanks to franchise shifts; to a true champion of the game on so many fronts, Branch Rickey; to his partner in the Continental League, William Shea; and finally, to the outpouring of millions of fans who wanted their own big league team, expansion was an inevitable force that was not about to be stopped or delayed any longer. Expansion is sort of like death and taxes, just a whole lot more enjoyable, except for the Seattle Pilots, of course.

But once you get the book deal you are looking for, the whole project can take over much of your life. You become infatuated with the idea. And as your work and dedication to the book grow, you begin to not only see the limitless possibilities, but also those familiar imperfections. While you love the research and the interviews and the perspective that has never really been put in such a manner, the road-

blocks, the writer's blocks and finding that elusive perfect phrase can drive you nuts. That's where family and friends come into play, as you spend nearly all of your free time breathing life into your book.

My two sons, Brent and Kyle, always cut me some slack when I'm involved with a book. It affects their lives, but they realize and understand how important it is to me. You'd be surprised how many times they help me out with one of those words or phrases that I lose even more hair over. I'm also one of those people who believes that our animals are family members too. While at the end game of this manuscript, our family lost perhaps its nicest member, our dog Allie. She had graced us with her love and attention for seven years and we all miss her terribly.

I have a great support group of friends who are willing to listen to my countless array of new ideas that are no doubt going to put me on the best-seller list. My friends Lou and Marcia Chimenti always listen and give their support, as well as getting me out and about. John Warren has read over my book proposals with meticulous care and always takes an interest, offering his gut reaction based on decades of sports and life knowledge. And there are countless former colleagues, such as Christina Mitchell and Carole Fleck, who also offer their support and understanding.

My favorite place in the world is the beach. That's where my world works best. And it works perfectly there. Whether I'm searching for a book idea or in the midst of self-doubt over whether or not I can really pull a project off, one of the best things I can do is to bounce ideas off some good friends at DiOrios in Somers Point, New Jersey. Owner Denny DiOrio is a lifelong sports fan who is more than willing to talk and offer suggestions. And in addition to making the best Bloody Mary in the Garden State, Jim Driscoll has a great feel for sports in general and baseball in particular. Without these guys, my ideas would be much more limited. Although, I must admit that as hard as I tried, it was tough to work through Jim's latest book idea for me, "Babes, Booze, and Baseball." Maybe next time.

Another good buddy, Peter Coolbaugh, a baseball aficionado in the truest sense, helped with many aspects of the project, such as the title. He has been a true supporter and a good friend who is never too busy to offer suggestions and ideas. I only wish I didn't embarrass Peter and myself by my second-division finishes in his fantasy baseball league.

While I'm anything but starstruck, picking the brains of other authors, baseball executives, former players, and historians is just plain fun. Peter Golenbock, Dick Beverage, Bob McGee, Professor John Rossi, Tal Smith, Bill Giles, Hall of Famer Pat Gillick, Eli Grba, Steve Arlin, Bob Bruce, Carl Erskine, Jay Hook, Larry Colton, Dean Chance, Bill Stoneman, and others shared their knowledge and experience to give credibility to the effort. I can't say enough about Branch Rickey III, who shared his heartfelt feelings about the game of baseball, expansion, and his grandfather, Branch Rickey, who I consider the greatest innovator and the most influential person in the history of America's Game. Branch III's good friend Justice George Nicholson, Court of Appeals, Third Appellate District, State of California, who has a life-long passion for baseball, was a great source of information and encouragement for me as well.

Two of the most enjoyable parts of my life are baseball and writing. Having the opportunity to write about baseball and put my words out there for public consumption and yes, even criticism, is a satisfying, interesting and very enjoyable process. Well, not so much the criticism part of the equation. How dare you not like my new love interest!

Here's to hoping that you enjoy *Baseball's New Frontier*. If you find it interesting and entertaining and learn something new about a phenomenon that began a generation ago, then I've succeeded and completed my task. And if it leaves you underwhelmed, at least know that it was an effort filled with a love of the game and a thirst for more knowledge about it.

Enjoy!

Baseball's New Frontier

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Introduction

For just about a hundred years, the baseball universe was centered right near the border of Pennsylvania and Ohio. The eight National League teams and eight American League teams were located in and around the mid-Atlantic states, going only as far west as Chicago and St. Louis.

At the turn of the last century, it took nearly a day to travel from New York to those “far west” destinations via the railways. In those days, when baseball teams traveled, they did so almost exclusively by train and sometimes by bus. A travel day was just that, a day of travel. In today’s game, for the most part, a travel day is basically a day off. While these long train sojourns served as a way for teammates to develop friendships and bond as a team, this kind of travel was certainly no walk in the park.

The first team to fly to another city was the Cincinnati Reds, who flew to Chicago on June 8, 1934, but it wasn’t until the 1950s that air travel happened on a more regular basis. This certainly made travel between baseball venues an easier endeavor, making further western expansion a viable option. Baseball moved slowly in many areas,

including travel, integration, and basic individual rights for its employees. America's Pastime has always seemed to lag behind the curve. But then it always seems to make up for lost time.

As the game progressed into the post–World War II era, American society was changing in many ways. Following the Second World War and the bloody Korean “conflict,” the economies of the Western World boomed, leading to a consumer-led economy that appeared to have no bounds. In 1950 the average income in the United States was \$3,210 per year. By 1959 it had jumped to \$5,010, an increase of 64 percent. People were buying homes and the affordability of automatic transmissions in 1950 helped fuel an increase in automobile sales. While 60 percent of American families owned a car in 1950, a decade later that figure had risen to 77 percent.

The living habits of many were also changing. As more and more people purchased automobiles, there was an exodus from the cities to the suburbs. This suburbanization of society was associated with increased city crime rates and congestion, as well as pollution. For most, the American Dream now consisted of a home in the suburbs and a driving commute to work.

This car-centric society no doubt influenced the changing landscapes in major cities. While the population became stagnant in many big cities, such was not the case in Los Angeles. The tenth largest city in the country in the 1920s, LA was one of the few cities to enjoy continued growth. With a population of nearly 2 million by the end of the 1950s, the City of Angels trailed only New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia in population. Eight of the ten largest American cities in 1950 neither maintained nor increased the population of that year. The only exceptions were New York and Los Angeles.

There was an exodus to California, and there was also an exodus from the major cities across the country. In previous years it was easy to walk to the baseball park to see a game, or perhaps catch a bus or hop on a local train. But now people flocked to the suburbs and most owned cars. This suburban shift enabled teams to relocate and build

stadiums out of the typical downtown areas, to the outskirts of a city where land was cheaper, parking was safer, and to a large degree, zoning laws were not as stringent.

Change was on the horizon and it would not be stopped. In 1955 the average distance between Major League ballparks was 469 miles. As a comparison, that average distance in 2005 was 1,155 miles. While today's game has spread out geographically, the 1950s saw a number of changes in the cities that sported big league teams. That comfortable, parochial feel of the game was gradually giving way to a more national presence. The exodus to the suburbs as well as some changing lifestyle choices saw long-time baseball teams in financial trouble with sagging attendance.

When the American League came into being in 1901, franchises were awarded to cities that already had National League teams, such as New York, Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia, putting the teams in direct competition for audiences. Other franchises were awarded in cities that were part of the contraction of 1899, in which Cleveland and Washington DC lost their franchises. The United States and baseball were both changing with difficult decisions being made.

After suffering through difficult times on the field and at the gate, with the Red Sox gaining more popularity, the Boston Braves left Beantown in 1953 and became the Milwaukee Braves, in the home of what was their top farm team, the Brewers. A year later, the St. Louis Browns, not as successful as the National League Cardinals, moved to Baltimore to become the Orioles. And in 1955 the Philadelphia Athletics moved to Kansas City, becoming the westernmost city in Major League Baseball. Clearly, as time moved through the 1950s, baseball became increasingly open to the concept of shifting franchises and moving to the west.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. But baseball attendance was on the wane. At the end of the Great Depression, baseball enjoyed a spike in attendance, and the same was the case in the era immediately after World War II, more than doubling the per-game average of the war years. But

in the 1950s, the number of fans attending games began to drop. The average per-game attendance from 1946 to 1949 was 16,027. But in the following decade, attendance fell to an average of 13,366. In fact, even through the 1960s, the per-game average, at 14,047 for each game, was still below that of the late 1940s. It was not until 1978 that the per-game average surpassed that of the immediate postwar years.

Competition for the ever-increasing personal discretionary income moved forward. While baseball had its own internal struggles and issues, the successful growth of the National Football League and the upstart American Football League proved to be a guiding light for America's Pastime. The NFL, which was formed in 1933, enjoyed steady growth and a rapid increase in popularity. As early as 1946, football saw the value in a franchise on the West Coast when the Cleveland Rams moved to Los Angeles. Four years later, in 1950, the NFL expanded to San Francisco and embraced the 49ers. And when the AFL debuted in 1960, it included such teams as the Dallas Texans, Denver Broncos, Houston Oilers, Buffalo Bills, Los Angeles Chargers, and the Oakland Raiders.

To a large degree the NFL and AFL were true trailblazers in American sport, having the vision and the determination to take the game of football all across the country. While there was a comfort zone because of the loyal support that college football had garnered in all regions of the United States, there was no guarantee that such support would be enjoyed for the pro game.

But it was enjoyed and supported. Baseball had long-range aspirations to add more teams, but despite some concerns over attendance, the popularity of the game was undeniable.

The postwar era in America was a time of conformity, prosperity, and peace. People liked Ike and there was a genuine feeling of well-being in the country. People had more spending money and it was spent on homes, cars, television sets and numerous household appliances. But much like in baseball, there were some cracks in the pretty picture and a dangerous undertow lurking.

Led by Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy, thousands of Americans were accused of being communist sympathizers, or being actual communists, often with little regard for evidence. Individual liberties were at stake, and McCarthyism was one of the most polarizing elements of the era. Baseball was able to steer clear of this area, but it should be noted that from 1954 until 1959, the Cincinnati Reds officially changed the team name to the Cincinnati Redlegs, to avoid confusion and possible association with “reds,” a moniker for communists.

At the same time, a number of social issues confronted America that were at some point mirrored by baseball. It took nearly a hundred years before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier to become the first black professional player for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. Racial discrimination and segregation became a lightning rod, eventually leading to demonstrations, violence, and calls for change. While Americans were able to enjoy various leisure activities as the use of television drastically increased, that venue for information and news also brought discrimination, violence, and the resulting demonstrations into every living room on a daily basis during the nightly news.

The skyline of America was gradually changing. As we will see time and again, societal changes would at some point be reflected in America's Game. One shifting domino would cause another to tumble.

Robinson's Brooklyn Dodgers had finally defeated the New York Yankees in the World Series in 1955. But the joy over that giant leap would soon be overcome by the harsh realities of the business side of baseball. The Dodgers needed a new stadium to replace Ebbets Field, which was increasingly in disarray and afforded only seven hundred parking spaces in a decaying area. The very things that drove residents out of the cities and into the suburbs were now keeping them from coming back to the city to enjoy baseball and threatening the health of a proud franchise. Dodgers owner Walter O'Malley wanted to keep his team in Brooklyn, but obtaining a site for a new ballpark would take several hundred acres. This was a difficult task in New York.

Buying the necessary land from individual landholders would have exceeded the team's financial means. At this stage, the only answer was either a gift of municipally owned land or the use of the city's power of eminent domain to obtain private property could make such a project even remotely feasible. At the same time the Dodgers hit a roadblock in New York, an attractive suitor presented an opportunity across the country in Los Angeles. That option appeared to be manna from heaven, since the city of New York would not gift land or use eminent domain to help the franchise develop a new stadium site.

"The city of New York refused to do either," wrote Benjamin G. Rader in his book *Baseball: A History of America's Game*.

Even though the Dodgers promised to bear all the construction costs for a new stadium, Robert Moses, the powerful head of the city's public parks department, blocked O'Malley's efforts to acquire an ideal site at the Atlantic Avenue Railroad Terminal. Moses argued that the acquisition would erase \$10 million from the city's tax rolls. Fortunately for Los Angeles, it already owned Chavez Ravine, a choice hilltop location overlooking the downtown area that the city had purchased for public housing.

Seizing over a growing hostility in Southern California toward public housing and anxious to attract the Dodgers, city officials quickly decided that transferring the land to O'Malley for nominal considerations constituted a proper use of the land.

Walter O'Malley did not want to leave Brooklyn, at least not initially. In an effort to make his situation better, he commissioned Norman Bel Geddes to investigate renovating Ebbets Field. In addition, more than a decade before the birth of the Astrodome in Houston, O'Malley was quite serious about building a domed stadium in Brooklyn, which would have been designed by Buckminster Fuller.

The Dodgers were not the only team experiencing difficult times in New York. The Giants, too, were a suffering franchise. Their on-field exploits in the mid-1950s were unremarkable, and attendance

dropped dramatically. In 1954, 1,115,067 fans flocked to see the Giants play. That mark shrunk to 824,112 the following year. The Polo Grounds had clearly seen better days, and the team's majority owner, Horace Stoneham, began to investigate moving the team. It was Stoneham's belief that playing night baseball in Harlem was not a successful recipe to attract fans from outside of the area.

Much like O'Malley, Stoneham investigated either renovating or replacing the Polo Grounds. In April of 1956, he expressed interest in a proposal made by Hulan Jack, the Manhattan Borough president. Jack floated an idea about building a triple-decker stadium on Manhattan's West Side, above the New York Central Railroad yards. The new stadium would also feature a subway station and parking for twenty thousand cars.

"As the Polo Grounds began to be viewed as an ancient, out-moded relic, there was talk of a new ballpark for the Giants," wrote Peter Golenbock in his enjoyable book *Amazin': The Miraculous History of New York's Most Beloved Baseball Team*.

On April 10, 1956, Stoneham announced he was "very interested" in a proposal made by Manhattan Borough President Hulan Jack for the construction of a new stadium on Manhattan's West Side. It was to be a triple-deckered arena seating 110,000 fans to be built above the tracks of the New York Central Railroad yards. There would be parking for twenty thousand cars and a subway station under the stadium. The cost would be \$75 million.

There was one catch: the city was not offering to pay for it. Stoneham had decided that Harlem was becoming too black for him to stay at his current location, that with the advent of night baseball he was concerned that his fans would think it was too dangerous to venture to upper Manhattan. Once he considered and rejected the notion of paying for this new stadium, he decided he had no choice but to leave New York. His first choice was Nordic Minnesota, the lilliest of lily-white suburbs.

The Giants' top farm team, the Minneapolis Millers, who played in Minneapolis–St. Paul, offered an attractive option for Stoneham, who seriously considered shifting his team there. While contemplating this move, San Francisco mayor George Christopher began negotiations with the Giants at the same time O'Malley was being courted by Los Angeles. A major hiccup in the Dodgers' grand scheme was that unless a second team relocated to the West Coast with them, Brooklyn would not be granted permission to move. At that point O'Malley approached Stoneham and pushed him to make the move. It certainly made sense on a couple of different levels. First, it would be much more attractive for visiting teams to play two teams in California rather than just one as far as cost effectiveness was concerned. And it would maintain the tremendous rivalry that the two teams enjoyed. While they would no longer be crosstown rivals, the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco already had a natural rivalry in place.

There was also a successful track record of baseball in California. The Pacific Coast League had been in existence since 1903, with core teams that included the Hollywood Stars, Los Angeles Angels, Oakland Oaks, Portland Beavers, Sacramento Solons, San Francisco Seals, San Diego Padres, and Seattle Rainiers.

"The Pacific Coast League wanted to be recognized as a third Major League," said Dick Beverage, secretary-treasurer of the Professional Ballplayers of America and a PCL historian.

That was really the thrust of expansion out here on the West Coast. The PCL operated independently for years. There were no farm teams, but some teams had gentlemen's agreements. Toward the end of the 1930s, the St. Louis Cardinals purchased the Sacramento franchise, which was a legit farm club. At that point, the Los Angeles Angels PCL team was owned by William Wrigley Jr., who was the major stockholder of the Chicago Cubs. In 1941 the Cubs purchased the Angels from the Santa Catalina Island Company along with all the contracts of the players, equipment, and the territorial rights to the Cubs.

So while the Pacific Coast League operated much like a Major League, the establishment was not about to open the door. A yearly occurrence saw the PCL commissioner Clarence Pants Rowland approach Major League Baseball about forming a third Major League. His league was frustrated with Major League teams taking its players. Early MLB commissioners Kenesaw Mountain Landis and Happy Chandler refused those overtures, and MLB hoped to do away with the Pacific Coast League, because it was viewed as a rival and partly because it was a natural area for eventual expansion.

“Year after year, the Coast League would make the same presentation to Major League Baseball,” said Dick Beverage.

Postwar attendance was really high. The Los Angeles and San Francisco clubs in the Coast League were outdrawing some big league teams. That ended after 1949 with the advent of television.

Major League Baseball said that they [the PCL teams] didn’t have big league parks. They said you have the population, but you don’t have the parks. But the nation was just coming out of a war, and before that there was a Depression. If you granted the PCL Major League status those parks eventually would have been built. County Stadium in Milwaukee was the first new ballpark since probably Yankee Stadium in 1923.

If this league had been earmarked as a Major League, the parks would have been built out here. The role of the Pacific Coast League was to bring to the attention to the moguls of Major League Baseball that there was a lot of money to be made out here. People settled in droves. Citizens were clamoring for Major League Baseball, and the owners saw California as a fertile market that was untapped. They wanted to keep the area available to them. They needed a place for some clubs that were not doing well to go to.

The Pacific Coast League was the Major League for fans on the West Coast. It offered quality baseball and had entertained fans for generations. They knew the players and enjoyed rivalries with other

teams. While there was newspaper coverage of the Major Leagues and weekly televised games, the PCL was king of the hill out west.

“I grew up in Los Angeles, and the Hollywood Stars were in the [Pacific] Coast League,” said former pitcher Larry Colton, who was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in Literature for his book *Counting Coup: A True Story of Basketball and Honor on the Little Big Horn*. “They were the Major Leagues for me. I followed the Major Leagues in the paper, and later they had the Game of the Week on tv. But the PCL was the Major Leagues to us on the West Coast. I knew every player on every team. My dad used to take me to games at Gilmore Field. Later in my pro career, I played in the PCL in San Diego and was the Opening Day pitcher at San Diego Stadium. I threw the very first pitch in that stadium.”

The baseball world often is affected by events in the real world. That truth had occurred repeatedly during the history of the game. But one of the most interesting examples is one of the least known. Every baseball fan in Brooklyn and Los Angeles is familiar with the City of Angels wooing the Dodgers out west in the 1950s. But in an interesting sideline, had a tragic occurrence not happened on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, it could very well be that the Brooklyn Dodgers would still be a National League club and that the New York Mets would never have been conceived.

“During the first week of December, the St. Louis Browns were moving toward the baseball winter meetings, which were to be held on December 8, 1941,” said Dick Beverage. “Donald Barnes, the owner of the Browns, was going to move his team to Los Angeles. The Browns were to have two-week home stands. So the Yankees would play one week in Los Angeles against the Browns, then the next week the Red Sox would, and so on. But after what occurred on December 7, Barnes took the issue off the table and subsequently sold the team. The new owner, Dick Muckermann, wanted to make a go of it in St. Louis. So that was actually the first venture of a Major League Baseball club moving to the West Coast.”

The trickle-down effects of such a move by the St. Louis Browns are interesting to consider. That meeting on December 8, 1941, could have seen the St. Louis move to Los Angeles approved and the start of discussions with other troubled franchises such as the Boston Braves and the Philadelphia Athletics to move to San Francisco. Had that happened, Los Angeles and San Francisco would have already had big league teams when Walter O'Malley started to look for options on the West Coast. And Horace Stoneham was already planning to move the Giants to Minneapolis before being approached by O'Malley to join him on the West Coast.

However that was not to be. The explosive and shocking entrance of the United States into World War II kept Los Angeles and San Francisco available to the Dodgers and Giants. As the postwar era continued to the mid-1950s, O'Malley was growing increasingly impatient with Brooklyn municipal officials. The lure of greener pastures in Los Angeles made it seem more and more like a real change in venue was possible. And the added interest from Horace Stoneham and the Giants was the final nail in the coffins of two proud New York franchises. "People have moved out of our city," Stoneham said. "You used to be able, at least over in Brooklyn, they could go out and get a crowd from within walking distance of the park and fill the stands. You can't do that anymore." All of the social factors and the changes happening in America's Game had combined and made this move possible.

"In '57 when they left, it was part of a troubled time in baseball history," said John P. Rossi, professor emeritus at La Salle University and author of *The National Game: Baseball and American Culture* and *A Whole New Game: Off the Field Changes in Baseball, 1946-1960*.

What generated the move as well as expansion in general were the problems that the game was experiencing. The A's had a horrible time of it and could not get the Philadelphia fans back. The same was true with the Browns.

O'Malley was in a situation where his attendance had gone from

1.8 million to 1 million in ten years. He had lost 800,000 fans and had no idea if he could build it up again in a 32,000-seat ballpark. Then a city comes along that would do anything to get baseball. He did what any businessman would have done.

What had been a very parochial country where people grew up and lived in the same neighborhood had turned into a much more mobile society with people willing to travel and explore new places.

“In the surge of prosperity after the war, people began to think about going somewhere,” wrote George Vescey in *Baseball: A History of America's Favorite Game*.

People came back from their first vacation to Florida or California, raving about the weather, the new houses, the beaches, the date-nut shakes. In the frozen Midwest, people woke up on New Year's Day and turned on their brand-new television set to the Rose Bowl parade and football game from Pasadena, California, and pretty soon a family down the block packed up and moved out west. . . .

The Dodgers led the league in attendance five times after the war and were solvent mainly because O'Malley had been quick to negotiate income from television rights, but he could see himself making considerably more money somewhere else.

O'Malley soon pulled off one of the great real estate deals in the history of American sports. Insisting he wanted to replace dumpy but vibrant Ebbets Field with a new stadium in downtown Brooklyn or in Queens, O'Malley really had his eye on Los Angeles. First, he talked the Wrigley family, which owned the Cubs, into trading its minor league Los Angeles franchise to him. Then O'Malley charmed the mayor of Los Angeles into deeding him a ravine on the northern edge of downtown. Wild and crazy spendthrift that he was, O'Malley even promised to build a ballpark with his own money. He knew building a ballpark was a mere operating expense. Land was the main thing.

Land in California, where flocks of people relocated. The area had already supported Minor League Baseball for decades. It was only a matter of time until the Major Leagues spread their wings to the area.

But little did anyone know just how many dominos would fall as a result.